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The Equifax Data Breach: Studying Public's Reaction Via the Lens of Tweets

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During the summer of 2017, the majority of U.S. citizens as well many citizens from other countries fell victim to a significant data breach at Equifax, one of the three main consumer credit reporting agencies in the United States. Equifax managers showed signs of negligence and carelessness in their planning and execution of necessary cybersecurity policies and practices. They showed equally inadequate behaviors in responding to the incident and managing its aftermath. In fact, some high-ranking managers at the company showed criminal opportunism through exploiting the decline of the company's stock prices for their personal gain. In this work we outline the major 2017 data breach at this company and investigate how the general public reacted to the event as reflected in their tweets. Specifically, we explore the polarity of tweet sentiments (i.e., their positive versus negative load) after the event (See Figure 1 as an outline) and how some of key negative emotions such as anger and fear reflected in tweets changed and evolved over time in response to the event (See Figure 2). We discuss implications for public relations and crises management at the time of data breaches.

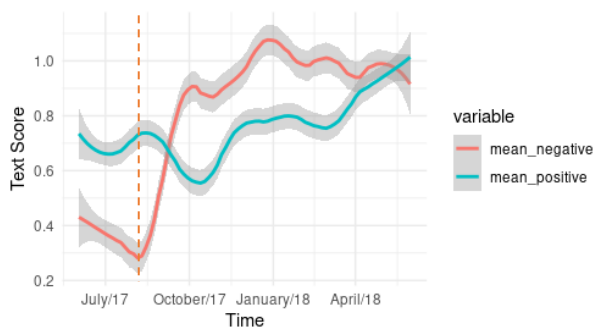


Figure 1. Change in positive and negative sentiment over time.

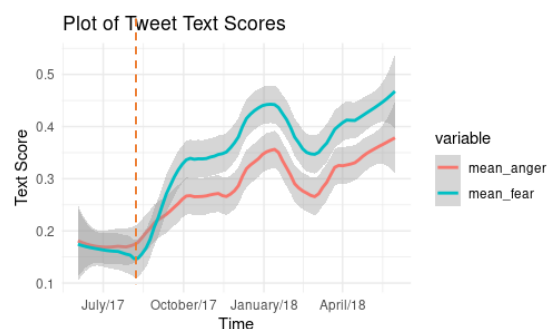


Figure 2. Change in negative emotions over time.